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Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State by Henry E. Hale

Review by: Luke March

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in that, like the introduction, it does not report or discuss the findings of the chapters in the volume, but is based on other sources. Thus it states that in the January 2006 gas crisis involving initially Russia and Ukraine, 'commercial factors were reportedly at the root of the problem' which was 'subsequently politicized' (p. 294). This ignores the research by Fantini in the same volume, which comes to the conclusion that Gazprom's desire for higher prices might be justified commercially, but the fact that Belarus was being offered gas more cheaply suggested a geopolitical motivation. The point is that the whole Russian pricing system for gas had been inherently geopolitical from Soviet times onwards, but Russia in the 2000s was moving from a policy of subsidizing all its neighbours, for geopolitical reasons, to a policy of charging its friends less than its enemies. Polikanov, on the other hand, goes too far in arguing that Gazprom is simply a tool of Russian foreign policy; it has its own interests, both as a commercial organization and as part of the Russian state. These questions about the politicization of energy supply are complex and deserve deeper research than is shown in the volumes under review.

Since these books were published, the world financial crisis has arrived and the price of oil and gas has been falling rapidly. It is by no means clear, however, that the relative decline in Russia's wealth will in itself lead it to play a more restrained role. On the other hand, it is possible that Barack Obama's presidency may have a positive effect on international relations globally, and facilitate a more cooperative climate to which Russia will contribute.

UCL SSEES

PETER J. S. DUNCAN

Hale, Henry E. *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2007. xi + 275 pp. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. £15.95: \$29.99.

THE single weak element in this magisterial book is its title — somewhat redundant in an era when United Russia dwarfs all other contenders, and when Russian federalism is a distant memory. Analysing Russian politics is like chasing a moving train at the best of times, and this title reflects research largely conducted prior to 2003 (albeit with a few observations made up to 2005). But an obsolete title aside, the substance of Henry E. Hale's detailed, scrupulously researched and engagingly written study is likely to be consulted for a long time to come. It makes key empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of Russian politics from a wide range of sources (particularly in Chapter 1's excellent literature review, with a good discussion of previous approaches to understanding Russian party weakness and a succinct summary of why parties remain vital in solving collective action problems).

Hale's central concern is why political parties long failed to fully penetrate the Russian polity. He finds his answer by looking at Russia as an 'electoral market' and focusing, above all, on the 'supply and demand' of party products in this market, and the potential availability of 'party substitutes' that might prove more attractive to candidates and voters (p. 19). Rather than being some mechanistic application of a rational choice model, the 'electoral market' approach focuses illuminatingly on why candidates decide to run for office on

party labels rather than as independents or as members of 'party substitutes' (in Russia, principally regional governors' machines, and 'politicised financial industrial groups'), and why voters might respond to party labels rather than the more clientelistic appeals of such party substitutes. Hale argues that in Russia, the strong executive 'superpresidency' consistently tilts the electoral market in favour of party substitutes.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed and wide-ranging discussion of national party development from 1989 to 2005, referencing many now half-forgotten party failures, and argues that those which were most successful started with significant political capital (usually via the 'patrimonial communist' [repressive and patronage-based] legacy or continued ties to the state) and which adopted campaign and party-building strategies which developed this capital. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive and rich analysis (relying on voter attitude surveys and quantitative analysis of national, gubernatorial and regional legislative party nomination strategies) to dissect the degree to which Russia has become a party system. Hale presents a nuanced picture, demonstrating neither party strength nor weakness, but identifies a significant increase in partisan influence throughout the 1990s (e.g. in the State Duma, voter identification with parties and parties' role in candidate nomination) combined with huge gaps in the party penetration of the polity (e.g. in party influence over federal and regional executives). However, earlier development had largely 'stalled' by the Putin era, with all parties bar United Russia atrophying. Chapter 4 provides the explanation: that candidates consistently had major incentives to run with party substitutes which 'crowded out' genuine parties in presidential and parliamentary elections and which 'decimated' them in elections for governorships and provincial legislatures (p. 195).

Hale consistently argues that party substitutes exist in all political systems, but it is their dominance over parties which is unusual in Russia. After pointing to their origins in Soviet political economy and the marketization process, in Chapter 5 he analyses how the executive branch was key in maintaining this dominance. Nothing about 'party substitutes' means they cannot become proto-parties (as with the emergence of the US Democratic Party). However, before 1999, the presidential administration consistently undermined such tendencies until 'scared straight' by the emergence of the anti-Kremlin Fatherland-All Russia bloc into realizing it needed a national party machine of its own to maintain power (p. 228). Thus Hale traces Putin's 'party-building' efforts (including a new Law on Political Parties, the introduction of proportional representation at regional legislative level and above all the increasing patronage of United Russia) directly to the Kremlin's survival instincts, and not to any altruistic realization that parties might help Russia's stability or governance. There are some interesting comparative observations in the conclusion that Hale invites us to research. Principally, he posits that weaker party systems are likely to emerge either from formerly patrimonial Communist countries or those combining federalism with a powerful central presidency (which, thereby and contrary to expectations, increase national *disunity*). The key motif throughout is that a powerful, legacy-aided presidency has been the driving force behind the development and defects of Russia's party system alike. At the time of writing, Hale remained open-minded that Kremlin-inspired party-building might inspire some future cyclical counter-mobilization and opposition electoral contestation. In the

aftermath of the 2007–08 elections it is clear that mobilizing the political elite and monopolizing the opposition can go hand-in-hand. Nevertheless, Hale's central theses are likely to stand the test of time, and this rich volume will remain pivotal for understanding Russian politics, perhaps even after Putin himself no longer remains so.

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LUKE MARCH

Wood, Tony. *Chechnya: The Case for Independence*. Verso, London and New York, 2007. 199 pp. Map. Notes. Appendix. Glossary. Index. £12.99 (paperback).

On first viewing, I was intrigued by the title of this book and the relevant meaning of it. Having not yet read beyond the title, Tony Wood, I thought, was going to make a case for contemporary Chechen independence as a sovereign state after Russia's two mass military invasions of that region and the incipient chaos created. But who, I wondered, was going to be the 'jury' for this, as implied by the judicial terminology of making a case? Would he be making a case, or impassioned plea, to the Russian government and/or people to free Chechnya, and allow some form of self-determination, or was Wood going to make a case for duly-designated 'international power brokers', even though the politicians of world powers are not in command of what the Russian military does or does not do outside of indirect influences? Alternatively, is he going to lose any basis on which he would be making some type of case, turning such an effort into merely an anti-Russian indictment, projected at the world-at-large?

After reading the book, it is clear that the third option is the chosen one, directed generally at an undefined 'international community'. This comes as a disappointment, as he begins and ends the book with making a reasoned legal and moral 'case' against the war, but ultimately settles into an anti-Russian track that few Russians would accept or sympathize with. Furthermore, it can be noted that such advice made to the 'international community' in this respect, basically towards no one in particular, is rarely, if ever, heeded.

Citing heavily from Moshe Gammer's recent book *The Lone Wolf and the Bear* (London, 2006), and from other academics such as John Dunlop, Wood argues that criticism of Russia over its Chechen policies has been insufficient, and that the international community has forgotten that the Chechen conflict is predominantly a war for separation of Chechnya from Russia, and not some blind Islamic assault on Western values, as Vladimir Putin sought to portray it.

The results of Wood's 'case' are somewhat mixed. Overlooking the role of the recent Chechen wars in the greater context of Russia's history with the region, Wood seeks to argue that Chechnya is vastly more of a failed state because of Russia's wars to quash the Chechen independence movements. However, it can be counter-argued that 1) Chechnya was never stable, and would only become stable relative to the stability and actions of its larger neighbour(s), and that 2) alternative arguments and interpretations should be